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Titzmann, P F ; Fuligni, A J

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Introduction
for the special section on immigration
International Journal of Psychology

Immigrants' adaptation to different cultural settings: A contextual perspective on
acculturation

Peter F. Titzmann
University of Zurich, Switzerland
Andrew J. Fuligni
University of California, Los Angeles, USA

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Peter Titzmann, University of Zurich, Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, Andreasstr. 15, 8050 Zurich, Switzerland. E-mail: titzmann@jacobscenter.uzh.ch.

Abstract

In modern multicultural societies more and more individuals deal with two or more cultures due to the unprecedented increase in international migration. This special section brings together research about immigrants' adaptation to various life domains, about the demands of dealing with different cultural scripts, and about how immigrants can successfully bridge different cultural demands. This introduction to the special section provides a broader theoretical framework that links the different studies of the special section and demonstrates areas for further research. It also clearly illustrates the growing necessity for research in increasingly diverse societies.

Order of papers for special section:

1. Ferrari, L., Ranieri, S., Barni, D., & Rosnati, R. (2015). Transracial adoptees bridging heritage and national cultures: Parental socialization, ethnic identity, and self-esteem
2. António, J. H. C., & Monteiro, M. B. (2015). Minorities' acculturation and social adjustment: The moderator role of meta-perceptions of majority' acculturation attitudes
3. Crosnoe, R., & Ansari, A. (2015). Latin american immigrant parents and their children's teachers in U.S. early childhood education programmes.
4. Schwartz, S. J., Unger, J. B., Baezconde-Garbanati, L., Benet-Martínez, V., Meca, A., Zamboanga, B. L., . . . Szapocznik, J. (2015). Longitudinal Trajectories of Bicultural Identity Integration in Recently Immigrated Hispanic Adolescents: Links with Mental Health and Family Functioning.
5. Noels, K. A., & Clément, R. (2015). Situated ethnic identity, cross-cultural adaptation and immigration generation status.

According to the United Nations, there have never been more immigrants than is seen today. According to UN figures, the number of international migrants increased from 154 million in 1990 to 175 million in 2000 to 232 million in 2013. These migration streams are not restricted to a particular region and are reinforced by political crises, wars, ethnic or religious hostility, and by substantial socioeconomic differences between regions. These sheer numbers and the growing cultural diversity confront all receiving societies with the complex challenge of dealing with issues growing from multicultural societies. Research has certainly recognized these necessities and started to develop ideas and approaches that not only help to understand minority or immigrant adaptation in a new society but also may provide solid evidence that can help policy makers and practitioners.

Advances in theoretical and empirical research have showed, however, that simple models of cultural adaptation may fall short of describing the complex reality. Some of the early models of cultural adaptation assumed, for example, a gradual behavioral shift from the heritage to the receiving culture with complete assimilation as final stage of adaptation (e.g., Gordon, 1964). Such unidimensional models of cultural adaptation have been identified as too simple, because immigrants can easily be involved in both heritage and receiving cultures to varying degrees and simultaneously may value both cultures (Berry, 1997; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). In fact, the involvement in two instead of one culture can be considered increasingly likely in contemporary societies. Affordable transportation and telecommunication allows immigrants to become increasingly transnational, keeping in touch with their homeland while successfully adjusting in the host nation (Iarmolenko, Titzmann, & Silbereisen, 2015; Leyendecker, 2011; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999). At the same time, interethnic partnerships are on the rise (Tindale, Klocker, & Gibson, 2014; Wright, Ellis, & Holloway, 2011) and, as one paper in this special section shows, transracial adoptions are gaining in prevalence (Ferrari, Ranieri, Barni, & Rosnati, 2015). In sum, more and more

individuals are confronted with several cultures, even though they do not necessarily have a first-hand migration experience.

The major aim of this special section is to bring together research that provides understanding of the contextual variations in the adjustment of immigrants. More specifically, we wanted to learn more about the challenges of immigrants' adaptation to various life domains, about the origins of such demands, and about how immigrants can successfully bridge different cultural demands. The importance of this topic can be seen in our receipt of more than 40 letters of interest in response to our call. Given the overall quality of the studies, we could have filled several special sections, but we were restricted and thus invited submissions based on various criteria, such as fit with the aims of our special section, methodological rigor, diversity of immigrant groups, and a mixture of methodological approaches.

Contextual variations in immigrant adaptation

When discussing the contextual variation in immigrant adaptation, the developmental ecology perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1977) comes to mind. Bronfenbrenner (1977, p. 514) assumed that development is the result of constant exchange between the “growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded.” The immediate environments, also called microsystems, are proximal settings and describe the exchange between an individual and their parents, school, and peer environment.

Microsystems, thus, reflect those proximal contexts with which an individual is directly linked and in constant interaction. Mostly, these microsystems are interconnected and the interconnection can be assumed to have effects on the human development that add to the unique effects of single microsystems. Such an interconnection is referred to as mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Mothers, for example, directly interact with schools, which can have

an effect on children's development. Besides the systems with direct contact, individuals can also be affected by the exosystem. The exosystem consists of settings that are not directly linked with an individual, but are indirectly connected through other microsystems. A prototypic example for the exosystem is the workplace, which can create stress for parents that can have an impact on children through changes in parenting behaviour. The overarching macrosystem refers to the culture or subculture with the specific economic, legal, or political system, which affects all other systems in the developmental ecology. In an immigration situation, all ecological systems are affected by the transition to a new country or by the situation of being a member of a minority in a particular host country. Of course, one special section is not sufficient to cover all these contextual considerations in great detail, but the studies presented in this special section of the *International Journal of Psychology* do highlight the immigration-specific demands in micro- and mesosystems, and also draw some attention to the macrosystem.

Two of the studies published in this section predominantly focus on immigrants' microsystems. Ferrari, Ranieri, Barni, and Rosnati (2015), the first study, investigated interactions in families with transracial adoptees. Drawing on the literature on ethnic identity development, this group identified strategies that help adoptive parents strengthen their adoptive children's ethnic identity development and self-esteem. The results indicate that transracial adoptive children profit from parents' encouragement to learn more about their heritage culture because it can boost their ethnic identity affirmation and their self-esteem, but only as long as they also develop a high level of national identity. The result is important not only for families with transracial adoptees, but for all families where children and adolescents are confronted with various cultures in contact, such as families with binational parents. All these families have to deal with the task of supporting their offsprings' integrating different cultures into their identity.

The second study (António & Monteiro, 2015) highlights immigrants' perceived attitudes of the natives population and how these perceived majority attitudes impact the adaptation of immigrants. Often, these perceptions are formed through peer contacts in school or work (Brenick, Titzmann, Michel, & Silbereisen, 2012). Hence, this study can be seen as representing the peer microsystem. The strength and innovative aspect of this multi-study paper is the experimental manipulation of immigrants' meta-cognitions (i.e., what do immigrants think the majority expects from them). Two results stick out from this study. First, individual acculturation orientations were no longer associated with outcomes, such as school success and intergroup relations, once the perceived majority attitude was entered into the regression. This result may indicate that immigrants adjust their attitudes to the expectations perceived to be held by the majority. The second result was a significant moderation of the individual association between acculturation orientation and intergroup relations by the perceived majority attitude. Taken together, both results show how immigrants' perceptions of the majority do change immigrant functioning. In addition, the interaction effect may explain mixed findings in earlier research, which may have been the result of immigrants being exposed to different majority attitudes.

The studies mentioned above focus on specific microsystems of immigrants. In the immigrant situation, however, the mesosystems (i.e. the interaction between microsystems) deserve specific emphasis because immigrants or minorities can be confronted with different cultural systems in different microsystems. Ethnic values and behavioural norms may dominate in one domain, such as the family, whereas mainstream values and behavioural norms may dominate another, such as the work or school environment. Although the study of immigrants' adaptation across different domains of life has been frequently advocated in research on immigration and acculturation (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2004; Oppedal, 2006), empirical evidence in this regard is still limited. Exceptions are studies by Birman and colleagues that showed that Russian and American acculturation predicted different

adaptation outcomes among Russian immigrants (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002) and that Russian and American acculturation supported life satisfaction through different mediating mechanisms (Birman, Simon, Chan, & Tran, 2014). Furthermore, research has identified spill-over effects. Conflicts in the family and peer domain can spill over to the respective other domain over time (Chung, Flook, & Fuligni, 2011) and adolescents' motivation to get into contact with natives can increase family conflict if their parents do not support this motivation (Titzmann & Sonnenberg, 2015).

Nevertheless, more research on mesosystems is required for a better understanding of the full complexity in this regard. The third study in this special section is an excellent model of such research. Crosnoe and Ansari (2015) investigated the intersection of family and early education institutions using a mixed method approach. The main question dealt with Latino parents' involvement in school matters. The quantitative results showed systematic differences between ethnic groups, with foreign-born Latino women scoring lower in cognitive stimulation and organized activities but higher in preschool involvement. The qualitative data added more insights into these findings. Personal interviews showed that teacher and Latino mothers' interactions were marked by a teacher-to-mother directed assignment of tasks with little freedom for mothers to independently decide what to do with their children. Latino mothers also had little impact on school matters, although both mothers and teachers endorsed the need for mutual collaboration. The strength of this study is that it clearly shows how different microsystems (school and family in this case) are linked and how the linkage can foster (e.g., through intense parent-school cooperation) or hinder the development of immigrant children.

All the three studies of this special section mentioned thus far focus on different aspects of immigrants' micro- or mesosystems in Bronfenbrenner's framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). But how do individuals deal successfully with the different demands of heritage and host culture across these micro- or mesosystems? There is no doubt that the

receiving society is responsible for creating an environment in which immigrants can prosper, for example through anti-discrimination legislations or measures to increase intercultural contact (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Slavin & Cooper, 1999). However, immigrant and minority members also may develop strategies that help them in dealing with these demands. One such strategy is described in the research of Schwartz et al. (Schwartz et al., 2015). In their six-wave longitudinal study, these authors followed first generation adolescent immigrants with a Latino background and could identify two groups. One group had developed a consistently high bicultural identity integration (BII) whereas the second group was consistently low in BII. Adolescents high in BII felt that they are able to combine both cultures in their identity, whereas adolescents low in BII had more difficulties to do so. Comparisons between both groups convincingly revealed that the high BII group was better off in various ways than the low BII group. They scored, for example, higher in outcomes related to well-being and family communication, even after accounting for the earlier assessments in these variables. The conclusion would be that a successful integration of both cultures gives individuals the competence and the self-confidence for dealing with the demands of multiple cultures.

The final, fifth, study of this special section (Noels & Clément, 2015) adds to this view by showing that first generation immigrants are better off in terms of psychological adaptation if they switch their identity between different settings. Such an identity switching may represent a potential mechanism of why a bicultural identity was beneficial in the Schwartz et al. (2015) study. Noels and Clément showed that first-generation immigrants reported higher values of heritage identity in private domains (e.g., the family) and higher values of the host identity in public domains (e.g. community). An important addition of this study is the inclusion of second-generation immigrants and participants with binational parents. Comparisons between these groups showed that identity fluctuations between private and public domains diminished in later generations and that the positive effects of identity

variability were restricted to first-generation immigrants. For individuals with binational parents, this variability was even associated with more ingroup and outgroup hassles. Thus, results from first-generation immigrants – such as those found in the Schwartz et al. study (Schwartz et al., 2015) – do not necessarily apply to later generations.

Although none of the studies directly addressed differences in the exo- or macrosystems, the special section does reflect on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) macrosystem. The data of the five studies come from groups in the US, Canada, Portugal, and Italy and thus cover some variation in the receiving culture and immigration policies. Many more countries could have been part of this special section. The letters of intent that were submitted in response to the call for submissions came from 22 countries and nearly all continents. A downside of the diversity of countries and immigrant groups is that data are not easily comparable and that the generalization of results received in one context for another context may be questioned. We therefore refrain from discussing the differences across studies. Instead, we want to point out two similarities. The first is that many countries are challenged with an ethnic diversity and that research started to address these challenges worldwide. Obviously, there seems to be a nearly universal need to learn more about opportunities for improving immigrant and minority adaptation. The second observation related to the seemingly universal immigration-specific task of finding a way of dealing with two (or more) cultures in contact. All five papers address the challenge of balancing and integrating various cultural patterns into the lives of ethnic minorities.

Challenges for Future Research: The Nested Nature of Acculturation

We are aware that a short special section like this, consisting of only five papers, is limited with what can be covered. Nevertheless, the studies presented cover important new areas and highlight new avenues for further research. We want to use the opportunity to point out some ideas where research in the future could go.

One of the major challenges for research and policy makers is the growing diversity in modern societies. Meissner and Vertovec (2015) showed, for example, that the US is host to people from 181 different countries, Canada hosts 156 nationalities, France 136 nationalities, and Germany 130 nationalities – to name just the top four diverse societies from the study. In addition, the number of the hosted nationalities increased between 1990 and 2000 in about 90% of all 59 observed countries (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015). Besides increasing nationalities, also the nature of immigrating groups seems to change. Research thus far has predominantly investigated immigrant groups where low socioeconomic standing, immigration-related experiences, and a rather large cultural distance to the receiving context are confounded. Nowadays, very different immigrant groups settle in receiving societies. Diaspora or return migrants are increasingly common worldwide (Silbereisen, Titzmann, & Shavit, 2014; Tsuda, 2009), who already share a connection with the receiving society before they actually enter the country and who often receive instant support and citizenship. Another growing group of immigrants are highly skilled individuals with a high socioeconomic standing. These groups result from the international competition for attracting high-skilled employees (Boeri, Brücker, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2012). This diversity poses a challenge for the generalizability of any results and research has to find ways of dealing with this issue.

One opportunity would be to invest in multiple replications. Berry and colleagues (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987), for example, designed a matrix consisting of receiving societies and immigrant groups and suggested to study each phenomenon in each cell to learn more about similarities in adaptation and the generality of relationships as well as group-specific aspects of adaptation and limits of generality. Although this approach is certainly very informative, the disadvantage of this strategy is the large number of studies required for each phenomenon under consideration. Another approach is suggested by Kohn (1987). Kohn (1987) recommends a comparative design, in which results found in one group or context are replicated in another group or context that is fundamentally different and which does

challenge the assumptions made from the original findings. If the results are replicated, the effects can be assumed to be robust. The disadvantage of this strategy is its focus on universalities rather than specificities of adaptation.

Besides these approaches, methodological advances in recent decades seem promising for dealing with the growing diversity. One such approach is multi-level modelling (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Multi-level models can be used to differentiate between the individual level (Level 1) and the group level in which individuals are nested (Level 2). The group level can be a receiving context or the immigrant group. In other words, in a multi-level logic, the behavioural outcome of an individual (e.g., the socio-cultural or psychological adaptation) depends on specific individual-level factors (e.g., developmental history, attitudes, person-specific social contacts) and more general factors of the group level (e.g., cultural orientation, receiving society, social class). More importantly, however, multi-level models allow the estimation of cross-level interactions. Cross-level interactions can show, for example, whether an effect found on the individual level (e.g., the association between attitudes and socio-cultural adaptation) differs in strength depending on the context (e.g., characteristics of the receiving society) or ethnic group membership (e.g., cultural distance of group to the majority). Such cross-level interactions can inform about the universality (non-significant interactions) and context- or group-specificities (significant interactions) of findings. Such an approach can help in dealing with multiple groups and receiving societies. A disadvantage of this approach is, however, that it requires a large number of countries or immigrant groups.

In addition, multi-level modelling allows researchers to move away from research on specific groups (Turks, Hispanics) to the underlying group-specific dimensions (e.g., lower social strata, degree of traditionalism, religiosity), because it is decisive to define the dimensions on which the Level 2 groups differ. A study on the religiosity of immigrants in Europe demonstrated, for example, that immigrants' religiosity was explained by individual and receiving societies' factors (Van Tubergen & Sindradóttir, 2011), whereas cross-level

associations did not add to the prediction - indicating similar underlying processes across the 27 receiving countries investigated. The advantage of moving away from groups to group-level variables has at least two advantages. First, the production of stereotypes about groups through research is reduced and, second, the knowledge gained in such research may inform about newly arriving immigrant groups not yet studied.

Besides contextual conditions, immigrants, as all human beings, face biological, social, and psychological changes over time. These can be related to cultural adaptation, but also to other factors, such as normative development or learning. Bronfenbrenner referred to these changes as the chronosystem of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1988). To uncover such changes, short-term and long-term longitudinal studies have to be conducted, a suggestion that has been made quite often in the past (Bronfenbrenner, 1988; Fuligni, 2001). Only longitudinal data allow to disentangle whether an observed change is due to normative development observed in all groups, independent of immigrant background, or due to acculturation related changes observed only among immigrants (Fuligni, 2001; Titzmann & Silbereisen, 2012). Longitudinal research also can reveal situational variation and its correlates (Yip & Fuligni, 2002). Such developmental changes can be easily implemented in the multi-level modelling by adding one more level to the analysis. Level 1 then refers to the intra-individual variation over time, which is nested within individuals on Level 2, which is again nested within a particular receiving context or minority group Level 3. Such three-level models have been successfully applied in recent analyses (Motti-Stefanidi, Masten, & Asendorpf, 2015).

Nevertheless, for conducting this kind of research, a good research infrastructure and the creation of large data sets is required. The best way to accomplish such a task would be to start international interdisciplinary collaborations that collect longitudinal data from multiple groups in multiple contexts. The great interest in this special section, as indicated by the large number of letters of intent from 22 countries, clearly shows that the necessity for

immigration-related research has been recognized worldwide. We hope that this special section offers some ideas about where this research could proceed how immigrants in various contexts behave, hopefully leading to new research and ideas.

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